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WILDLIFE SERVICES—OKLAHOMA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Oklahoma

Every day, Oklahoma residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Oklahoma Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and professional strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

Oklahoma is a diverse ecological mix of agricultural and forested environments and urban and suburban settings that are home to more than three million people. With the population growing, particularly in suburban settings, conflicts between humans and wildlife are expected to continue to increase as people encroach on both agricultural property and wildlife habitat.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To



support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Oklahoma's Flood Control Structures From Beaver Damage

Oklahoma has 2,094 upstream flood control dams which provide residents with benefits including flood protection, an agricultural water supply, a municipal water supply, fire protection, wildlife habitat, water quality improvement, and sediment retention. Around these dams, however, beaver populations have increased dramatically. Often their burrowing activity is so extensive that the integrity of the earthen dams are compromised, sometimes causing the dams to fail. WS works under a cooperative agreement with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission to protect flood control structures from beaver damage. WS' dam protection work saves Oklahomans millions of dollars in expensive repairs to these dams and guards against devastating floods. WS also conducts beaver damage management to protect commercial timber, crops and pastures, roads, and other private property including ornamental trees and shrubs.

Protecting Air Travel—Aircraft collisions with wildlife annually cost the U.S. civil aviation industry more than \$470 million in direct damage and associated costs and more than 500,000 hours of aircraft down time. There are about 2,400 bird collisions with U.S. commercial aircraft reported each year. Aircraft/wildlife strikes at Air Force bases also cause tremendous economic losses with more than 2,500 strikes a year at an average cost of \$34 million annually. Since 1985 the Air Force has reported approximately \$522 million in damage to aircraft caused by wildlife strikes. Tragically, these wildlife strikes have also resulted in 32 flight crew fatalities.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting flood control structures and water impoundments from beaver damage
- Protecting cattle, sheep, goats, poultry, and other livestock from predators
- Protecting airline passengers and aircraft from wildlife hazards
- Protecting pecans, peanuts, winter wheat, other crops, and livestock feed from crows, blackbirds, starlings, pigeons, Canada geese, and ducks
- Protecting urban and suburban property, including buildings, golf courses, city parks, industrial sites, and commercial sites from pigeon, starling, blackbird, and waterfowl damage

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Oklahoma:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Reducing blackbird and starling damage to feedlots and dairies
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock
- Controlling wildlife vectors of rabies
- Protecting timber and forest resources

The WS program is recognized nationally and internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. The National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), WS' research arm, continually conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce these hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to control or prevent these hazards. Applying this scientific expertise, the Oklahoma WS program provided assistance to 11 airports in fiscal year (FY) 2002 (eight civilian and three military) that included direct assistance, technical assistance, and training. On-site evaluations as well as comprehensive wildlife hazard assessments are conducted before direct assistance begins. WS has been able to significantly minimize the aircraft/wildlife strike risk at these airports and military bases.

Protecting Livestock From Predators—Predators like coyotes cause significant losses to many ranchers and farmers by attacking cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry. In 1996, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) surveyed WS customers and found that, in Oklahoma, predators killed an estimated 10,600 head of cattle and calves worth almost \$3.5 million. A NASS survey in FY 2000 found that during that year predators killed more than 2,600 sheep and lambs. Research results suggest these figures could be two to three times higher in the absence of an effective livestock protection program. Unfortunately, these losses are felt most acutely by small ranchers and farmers.

NWRC is developing alternative methods to reduce livestock predation. For example, NWRC's research on traps and snares has improved the selectivity of these tools with the addition of pan-tension devices on traps and breakaway snares. WS researchers are also working on developing a radio-activated Electronic Guard frightening device that activates when predators approach. Another nonlethal preventative method is the use of llamas as alternatives to guard dogs for protecting sheep flocks from coyotes and other predators.

Looking to the Future

Feral hogs are an extremely harmful invasive species in the southern United States. Damage caused by feral hogs in Oklahoma includes predation on lambs, calves, and goat kids; rooting damage to pastures and row crops; consumption and contamination of pecans,

peanuts, and other crops; and the transmission of diseases such as swine brucellosis and pseudorabies.

A second issue involves the increased need to protect crops such as winter wheat from the increasing damage caused by Canada geese. Canada goose populations are at an all time high and more migratory geese are becoming year-round residents. Current constraints have made it difficult for WS to adequately address this growing issue.

Another bird causing problems in Oklahoma is the crow. Crows cause significant damage to pecan and peanut crops in Oklahoma. Annual State cash receipts for peanuts in Oklahoma average around \$50 million and while cash receipts for pecans vary, they can be as high as \$20 million. Crow damage to these crops is increasing each year. Current program constraints have made it difficult for WS to effectively assist pecan and peanut growers with crow depredation problems.

Oklahoma Wildlife Services Funding • • • • •

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

